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Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations

Culture of peace

Letter dated 7 February 2006 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In the wake of the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in the press of certain countries and the ensuing incidents, we have the honour to enclose herewith the article entitled "A Call for Respect and Calm", which was co-authored by the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Mr. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and published in the *International Herald Tribune* on 6 February 2006 (see annex).

Turkey and Spain initiated the project for an Alliance of Civilizations which is now placed under your auspices, and you have appointed a High-level Group to elaborate a report with proposals for action. This crucial time shows the relevance of the initiative and the timeliness of your vision in taking the project for the Alliance of Civilizations forward within the United Nations framework.

We would be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 42 and 43.

(*Signed*) Baki **İlkin**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Juan Antonio **Yáñez-Barnuevo**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 7 February 2006 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Article entitled "A Call for Respect and Calm", co-authored by the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and published in the *International Herald Tribune* on 6 February 2006

With growing concern, we are witnessing an escalation in the disturbing tensions provoked by the publication, in European newspapers, of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad which Muslims consider deeply offensive. We shall all be the losers if we fail to immediately defuse this situation, which can only leave a trail of mistrust and misunderstanding between both sides in its wake. Therefore, it is necessary to make an appeal for respect and calm, and let the voice of reason be heard.

Last year, when the Heads of Government of Turkey and Spain presided over the launching of work on the Alliance of Civilizations project, we did so based on a firm belief: that we needed initiatives and instruments to stop the spiral of hatred and obfuscation which, in itself, constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

The unfortunate events that we are seeing now only reaffirm our diagnosis and our commitment to seeking even more support for this cause.

Historically, Spain and Turkey have been at the crossroads between East and West. Therefore, we are very much aware that the way in which close contact between different cultures is handled can be enormously enriching, but it can also set off destructive contentions.

In a globalized world, in which the relationships and exchanges among different civilizations continue to multiply, and in which a local incident may have worldwide repercussions, it is vital that we cultivate the values of respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Freedom of expression is one of the cornerstones of our democratic systems and we shall never relinquish it. But there are no rights without responsibility and respect for different sensibilities. The publication of these caricatures may be perfectly legal, but it is not indifferent and thus ought to be rejected from a moral and political standpoint.

In the end, all of this lends itself to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of cultural differences that are perfectly in harmony with our commonly shared values. Ignoring this fact usually paves the way for mistrust, alienation and anger, all of which may result in undesirable consequences that we all have to work hard to avoid.

The only way for us to build a more just international system is through maximum respect for the beliefs of both sides. We are fully committed to observing the norms of international law and to the defence of the international organizations that embody it. But neither laws nor institutions are enough to ensure peace in the world.

We need to cultivate peaceful coexistence, which is possible only when there is interest in understanding the other side's point of view, and respect for that which it holds most sacred. These are the basic premises and main goals of the Alliance of Civilizations promoted by Spain and Turkey.